



# The church and enculturation: A theological approach for evangelistic missions in the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian (CCAP) Livingstonia, Blantyre and Nkhoma Synods in Malawi in 21<sup>st</sup> Century

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## Abstract

The study will reflect on how the concept of enculturation could be addressed in the evangelistic mission of the Church of the Central Africa Presbyterian (CCAP), Livingstonia, Blantyre Synod and Nkhoma Synods in Malawi. Enculturation relates to an interaction between the Christian faith and traditional culture. The interaction of (or dialectic between) Christian faith and culture is the raw material for the conversation of enculturation. The aim of this study was to investigate whether enculturation could be illuminated to give insight into its meaningful understanding and implications on the European missionary enterprise and eventually how the contemporary church could manage the gospel message and culture in its *missio-dei* endeavours.

**Keywords:** enculturation, Church of Central Africa Presbyterian (CCAP), culture, ethnicity, tradition, church polity, diversity.

## Introduction

This study reflects on how the concept of enculturation could be addressed in the evangelistic mission of the Church of the Central Africa Presbyterian (CCAP), Livingstonia, Blantyre Synod and Nkhoma Synods in Malawi. The conversation on the relationship between “church and traditional culture of the people” has for a long time become a topical issue in the church. The Church of Central Africa, Presbyterian (CCAP) is structured mainly based on traditional culture, religious circumstances, socio-political and linguistic matters of regions of Malawi (Sundkler & Steed, 2000:467-80, 795ff). This question of “church and side-lining/eliminating culture of the people” has given rise to many unanswered questions with regard to the method of gospel evangelization and system of church government employed by some European Missionaries in Malawi and the rest of Africa (Tarimo, 2000:5).

## Definition of terms

According to Rooms (2007:6f), the term “enculturation,” is the adaptation of the way church teachings are presented to non-Christian cultures and, in turn, the influence of those cultures on the evolution of these teachings. Enculturation as a technical term in cultural anthropology for indicating the learning experience by which an individual is initiated and grows into his culture, while reserving the term enculturation to denote the process by which the church becomes inserted in a given culture (Byrne, 1990:139). Acculturation is the process of two cultures meeting



together, whereby both cultures are radically changed (Byrne, 1990:139). However, the process is often governed by power relations in that the more powerful culture determines the path of cultural change. Cultural change though will always be the outcome of acculturation (Rooms, 2007:6-7). The Roman Catholic theologians have generally used the term “enculturation” from just before, and then during and after the Second Vatican Council (Shorter, 1988: 10). The Protestants, on the other hand tend not to use enculturation, preferring the word “contextualisation,” which is employed to widen the meaning of the second pole to anything that has to do with the context in which Christian faith is set (e.g. historical, political and economic contexts).

The word “culture” denotes a historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life (Geertz, 1973:89). Jenkins (1997:9-13) holds that “ethnicity” or the word “ethnic” comes from the Ancient Greek word *ethnos*, a people, a collectivism of humans living and acting together in a distinct culture. Ethnicity means someone’s traits of ancestry, classification, cultural background, language, beliefs, rituals, dressing, and “ethnic group” is a group of people who separate themselves to behave differently from other ethnic groups according to situations (Hornby, 2010:500).

Therefore, in this study enculturation relates to an interaction between the “Christian faith and culture” (Rooms, 2007:4f). It is the sustained, unceasing penetration of the host “culture’ that maintains the Christian faith within that culture (Rooms, 2007:4-5). Enculturation is a “neologism” (Shorter, 1988: 10, Crollius, 1978:721ff). The aim of this study was to understand the meaning and implications of enculturation, how the CCAP Synods’ denominations could relate the “Christian faith” to diverse “traditional cultures” in Malawi and elsewhere. The importance of culture in the missiological process cannot be overstated, because culture is the social framework wherein an individual or group interprets the information or events of one’s experiences (Byrne, 1990:139).

The central question for the study is: how can the concept of enculturation be addressed in the evangelistic mission of the Church of the Central Africa Presbyterian (CCAP), Livingstonia, Blantyre Synod and Nkhoma Synods in Malawi? In this research the following structure was used: the divisions based on culture in the CCAP Livingstonia, Blantyre and Nkhoma Synods in Malawi, the missiological challenges in the history of the church, the Scriptural and theological bases for enculturation in the New Testament Church, and an analysis and evaluation of the church and enculturation for the contemporary church in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. However, the enculturation theology stresses that the goal is not to promote the African and other cultures. But the goal lies in allowing the gospel message to challenge the African and other cultures to be reformed in line with the Christian faith. Therefore, this new theological approach to evangelistic enterprise in the CCAP Synods will allow for a dialogue to take place between the two realities: “Christian faith and traditional culture”(Rooms, 2007:8f).

### **The divisions based on culture in the CCAP Livingstonia, Blantyre and Nkhoma Synods in Malawi**

The divisions based on traditional culture in the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian (CCAP), Livingstonia, Blantyre Synods and Nkhoma Synods in Malawi dates back to 1870s when Dr James Stewart of Lovedale Mission in the Eastern Cape in South Africa attended the funeral of Dr. David Livingstone in Westminster Abbey in Britain in 1873 (Gama, 2010:49). He appealed to the divided General Assemblies of the Free Church of Scotland and the Church of Scotland based



on doctrine and church polity to support the noble cause of reaching new peoples in the interior of Africa, introduce Christianity and eliminate slavery and its evils (Gama, 2010:49f).

In May 1875 a pioneer party under Edward D. Young, veteran sailor, left for Africa. Other members were Dr. Robert Laws, a medical officer, John McFadyen, Allan Simpson, engineers, George Johnston, a Carpenter and William Baker, a seaman (McCracken, 2000:47-64). Henry Henderson who was sent by the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland to find a suitable site for establishing a mission station also accompanied them. In South Africa, Dr. Stewart recruited four Xhosa Africans namely Shadrach Mqunana, William Koy, Isaac Wauchope and Mapassa Ntintili to serve as teachers and evangelists (McCracken 2000:47-64f).

### **The Livingstonia Synod**

The Free Church of Scotland established the Livingstonia Synod. From South Africa, Edward D. Young and his group traveling with some difficulties up the Zambezi River and on land, they reached the Shire River in Malawi, the country of their destination, and on 12 October 1875, they sailed onto the Lake Malawi itself (McCracken, 2000:66). Young called for the Old Hundredth (Psalm) to be sang in praise to the Lord their God. They eventually came to drop anchor at Cape Maclear:

“Livingstonia is begun” wrote Laws, though at present a piece of canvas stretched between two trees is all that stands for the future city of that name. (McCracken, 2000:66).

The difficulties of inhospitable climatic conditions, illnesses and deaths of the new comers forced them to move to Bandawe among the ethnic Atonga in the Northern part of Lake Malawi in 1881 (Thompson, 1975:7). They moved again to Kondowe in 1884, Rev. Dr. Robert Laws named the new Mission site “Livingstonia” Mission expansions were soon made among the ethnic Ngoni in Mzimba, Chewa in Kasungu, ethnic Tumbuka in Loudon and Ekwendeni. The Livingstonia Presbytery met for the first time in 1889 marking the first step the church was taking towards self-sufficiency in the Northern Region of Malawi (Thompson, 1975:7).

### **The Blantyre Synod**

The Established Church of Scotland group consisting of a Medical doctor, five artisans led by Henry Henderson separated themselves in July 1876. They went up to Ndirande Hills in search of a site for their mission station among the ethnic Yao and ethnic Makololo that would become the Center for Christian mission, commerce, education and agriculture in the Southern Region of Malawi. Soon the Mission site was identified and named “Blantyre” after the birthplace of Dr. David Livingstone on 23<sup>rd</sup> October 1876 (Selfridge, 1976:32).

### **The Nkhoma Synod**

The Dutch Reformed Church of the Western Cape in South Africa established the Nkhoma Synod. Rev. Andrew C. Murray first arrived in Malawi in 1885 and he toured mission fields in which his Synod would work and recommended that “it was time for them to open up a new field” (Selfridge, 1976:60). After going for further training in Edinburgh in Scotland where he met members of the Livingstonia Mission Committee he went back to South Africa where he was chosen as the first missionary of the Dutch Reformed Church to go to Malawi. In July 1889, Rev. T.C.B. Vlok, the second missionary of the Dutch Reformed Church Mission arrived in Malawi. With the help of Rev. T.C.B.Vlock, Murray toured the South- West of the lake and on 28<sup>th</sup> November 1889, they



chose a new site near Chiwere's Village among the ethnic Chewa and called it "Mvera"(Obedience) in Dowa in the Central Region of Malawi (Weller *et al.*, 1984:114).

### **The missiological challenges in the history of the CCAP Synods in Malawi**

In the context of Africa, contemporary church denominations are increasingly realising the missiological challenges that they have not yet succeeded in becoming indigenous to traditional culture of Africa (Rooms, 2007:9f). Some few scholars have written articles on tension on the part of the White missionaries and their negative tendencies towards African tradition fuelling ethnic divisions in the CCAP Synods of Livingstonia, Blantyre and Nkhoma in Malawi. Mapala (2016:1f) holds that the challenge of ethnicity and traditional culture are systematically embedded both in the history of the CCAP Synods as well as that of Malawi as a nation. Kayambazinthu and Moyo (2002:92) write that the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian (CCAP) Synods contributed to regionalism and tribalism because the demarcations of their borders were identical to the politics and regional boundaries in Malawi. The CCAP Nkhoma Synod uncritically derived its church polity from that of the traditional Nyau cult and drew its leadership from the ethnic Chewa and Ngoni Chiefs/Village Headmen (Nkosini) and other leaders of society (Msangaambe, 2011:63f).

In the CCAP, there are separate congregations designated exclusively for the ethnic Nkhonde, Tumbuka, and Tonga language speakers in the Northern Region, ethnic Chewa language speakers in the Central Region, ethnic Yao, Chinyanja and Lomwe language speakers in Southern Region. However, Kurewa (2000:9) argues that the Christian denominational churches in Africa still function in "strange ways", not relevant to traditional culture and aspirations of the African people.

### **The challenge of division on traditions and effects of colonialism**

The challenge of divisions on traditions and evils of colonialism played a major role in fostering ethnicity Malawi (Kaspin, 1995:595-620). The European Missionaries faced a homogeneous traditions, foreign and different cultures as well as evils of colonialism contrary to Scriptures and evangelistic pursuit. Such "strange traditions and culture" in the eyes of the European missionaries included African rites of passage, initiation ceremonies, African wedding ceremonies, polygamy, funeral and authoritarian practices.

Mapala (2016:209) holds that the ethnic intolerance in Malawi was a social product of the colonial and post-colonial eras and of the Protestant Missionaries, more especially the apartheid-minded Afrikaner Missionaries, who exported their home social-political differences to mission fields; this even though the indigenous Christians wanted a church that was free from denominational and ethnical differences (Mapala, 2016:209). Ethno-national differences determined the politics of inclusion and exclusion between the English and Afrikaner Missionaries (Mapala, 2016:209ff). The Anglo-Boer War had far-reaching effects on the people living beyond the borders of South Africa. It did not only affect the relationship of the British and Afrikaner politicians but also permeated into ecclesiastical spheres and raised tension between indigenes that used to live side by side. The British–Afrikaner tension was very evident in the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian (CCAP) Mission stations (Mapala, 2016:146f).



The expatriate missionaries had not dealt with the issue of total union of the synods fully before handing them over to the local leaders (Mgawi in Munyenyembe, 2016:15). The local leaders were, therefore, not able to initiate further unification, especially in view of the fact that the mother churches had committed themselves to keep on helping their former missions with money, personnel and other resources. Msiska (2011:111f) contends that churches in Africa have church traditions and orders that were imposed on them by European Missionaries and there is uncertainty as to which direction church polity could take. Therefore, the indigenous African leaders inherited a church not fully united in its evangelistic mission enterprise (Mgawi in Munyenyembe, 2016:15). However, by settling for a federalism, which was based on inter-regional suspicion/mistrust, the CCAP actively contributed to the ethnic division of the country (Munyenyembe, 2016:5f). Consequently, the European Missionaries opted to divide the CCAP Synods according to traditions of the people in restricted denominational areas of operation in the North for Livingstonia, South for Blantyre and Central for Nkhoma respectively (Pohor, 2006:316).

### **The challenge of ethnic segregation from South Africa**

Selfridge (1976:27-37) alleges that the culture of ethnic segregation from South Africa characterised the CCAP Nkhoma Synod in Central Region in Malawi. The Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) Missionaries practised ethnic segregation as they made in-roads in the area of Chief Mwase (Selfridge, 1976:27-37). It appeared that the Presbyterian tradition did not appeal much to the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) Missionaries, as they were more interested in advancing the Dutch identity along with its racial political undertones from South Africa. Among White Missionaries, the Dutch identity was not based on ecclesiastical tradition, but rather on a nationalistic ideology that arose as result of the Anglo-Boer War against the English (Mapala, 2016:97). The colonial administrators employed a divide and rule strategy to serve their interests.

In the 1890's the British Colonial administrators encouraged competition between ethnic groups and favored certain ethnic groups that were friendly to them. The underlying factor for the choice of chiefs to be included in the indirect rule scheme was the ability to govern a large political area (Mapala, 2016:133). The colonial legacy for indirect rule, using the strategy of divide-and-rule in the 1880s became a dominant practice in Africa between the 1930s and 1950s (Mapala, 2016:19f). The ethnic conflicts in the Anglophile African states are largely a direct product of the British colonial legacy of the indirect rule through a strategy of divide-and-rule (Mapala, 2016:16-20).

### **The challenge of ethnic CCAP Synods' denominations in Malawi**

The challenge of ethnic CCAP Synods denominations characterized the evangelistic enterprise in Malawi. According to Pohor (2006:316), many Christian denominations and local churches were indeed organized along ethnic/tribal lines in Africa. One of the main socio-historical reasons was that Western Missionaries tended to work in specific regions and focused on particular ethnic language groups (Pohor, 2006:316f). Bates (1973:23) argues that every African belongs to a tribe, and every tribe is under a traditional leader or chief. Most Africans identify themselves to their tribes, chiefs and traditional cultures such as values, belief systems, language and entire way of life. The process leads to the visibility of ethnic identity in Malawi (Mapala, 2016:16-20). Individuals mobilise themselves and exclude those who did not belong to their tribe.

In the 1890s, amidst resistance from the British Government and South African British Company to colonize Malawi, the CCAP Synods were not only one of the influential denominational churches in the country, but it was also the main political player in the creation of Malawi as a nation-state (Ross, 1996:85,103). However, during the pre-colonial period, different ethnic groups related to one another in Malawi, with particular attention to acculturation, integration and



intermarriage, and these sociological processes shape people's ethnic identities (Mapala, 2016:15).

In some African societies, ethnicity was not universally practised across the continent, because in certain instances, a tribal chief was ruling an ethnically heterogeneous society. For example, most Malawian chiefs had been ruling ethnically heterogeneous societies for over a century (Mapala, 2016:20f). Tarimo (2000:7f) argues that the question of ethnicity and ethnic divisions cannot be addressed by state government machinery. The attitudes, behaviours and practices of manipulation are to be transformed and eliminated by relevant biblical approaches. On the other hand, when appropriated properly, ethnicity and ethnic divisions could be positive ingredients that guarantee the realization of the idea of civil society by enhancing participation, integration of loyalties and commitment to the public good of the church and society (Tarimo, 2000:7ff). Therefore, the ethnic conceptions and leadership style from both traditional chiefs and White Missionaries contributed negatively to the church polity discourse and practice (Bates, 1973:23).

### **The challenge of superficial approaches to evangelistic enterprise**

The challenge of superficial approaches to evangelist enterprise characterised missionary work in Malawi. There was probably a gulf between Christian orthodoxy in Africa and the grass roots cultural way of life in the churches. A gulf was perhaps based on how the church employed superficial missiological approaches imported from the West to reach the indigenous African people over many years (Byrne, 1990:139).

### **Some theological bases for enculturation in the New Testament Church**

#### **Jesus born and raised up as a Jew**

The Scripture indicates that Jesus Christ was born into a Jewish ethnic group in about 5 BC (Hastings & Selbie, 1950:444). His ethnic genealogy could be traced from Abraham to David and from David to captivity in Babylon, and from Babylon to the birth of Jesus Christ, fourteen generations respectively (Matthew 1:1-17, cf Romans 4:16-20). Jesus Christ participated in the cultural practices of the Jewish people according to the Law of Moses (Leviticus 12, 19, 21-23). In Luke, Jesus was circumcised when He was eight days old (Luke 2:21). He was then taken to Jerusalem for the purification rites (Luke 2: 22ff). Jesus went through all the rituals required of Jewish people. When He was twelve years old, they went up according to custom to present Him in the temple (Luke 2:40-51). Jesus grew as a normal Jewish boy in the process of development. He was subjected to ordinary human experiences of hunger, thirst, weariness and fatigue, pain and suffering and at length He underwent a truly human death and burial (Matthew 8:24, 21:8, John 4:6, 11:35, 19:28, Bromiley, 1992:1048). He accepted the authority of the law, conformed to temple practices, engaged in synagogue worship, and throughout His life lived as a Jew (Ladd, 1996: 246). He was so familiar with His people and their ways that when He taught He did so with authority. According to Matthew: When Jesus finished these sayings, the crowds were astonished at his teaching for he taught them as one who has authority (Matthew 7:28, 29).

Jesus Christ was perceived as one of the Jewish rabbis in John's account of Nicodemus' encounter with Jesus. Jesus was addressed as "Rabbi" or "Teacher" (John 3:2) and had disciples just as the Rabbis did. Jesus Christ was thoroughly a Jew in every aspect (Hastings & Selbie, 1950:447-448). Jesus Christ "came as a Jew to the Jewish people" (Sule-Saa, 2000:33). Therefore, from Scripture, it is very significant to understand that Jesus Christ was nurtured and socialised as a true Jew in His ethnic group (Hastings & Selbie, 1950:447-449).



### **The *qahal* based on Christ's new identity**

In the New Testament, both the Jewish believers and the Gentiles were accepted as full members of the *qahal* or *ekklesia*. A proselyte in the Old Testament is a Gentile who has converted to Judaism, is bound to all the doctrines and precepts of the Jewish religion and is accepted as full member of the Jewish people (Deuteronomy 5:14, 16:11-14). The history of the proselytes in Israel indicates that the Law of Moses made specific regulations regarding the admission into the *qahal*, people who were not born Israelites (Exodus 20:10, 23:12, 12:19, 48).

Calvin (1536:202f) maintained that the church had a corporate identity and authority which had been received from God. The new identity is given to the people of God who receive the message of salvation in their ethnic-traditional culture. Christ is the new identity. The church is the new people of God, made possible by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and created by His Spirit living in their midst. The church is the new community of the resurrection, the fellowship of men in whom God's Spirit dwells, the fraternity of the forgiven, the people who are called out of the world (Du Plooy, 1982:52f).

### **A *qahal* based on the removal of ethnic social barriers**

The gospel of Christ removes ethnic and social barriers. The proclamation of the kingdom and Christ's actions had a dual effect: it unified and separated people; Christ's proclamation of the kingdom leads to the formation of the church (Matthew 16:18). The New Testament Scripture indicates that God has given the church the gospel message of reconciliation. Berkhof (1962:59) holds that in Colossians 1:1ff, Paul advocates for the message of reconciliation saying: "Christ reconciles all things in heaven and on earth to Himself". Reconciliation with God necessarily includes the reconciliation of those who are estranged. In 2 Corinthians 5: 18-21, it says: The barriers that people set up against each other, in order to maintain their position, and to put down others, ought to be broken down through mission and fellowship of Christ (Moltmann, 1977:351, Van Ruler, 1969:139). God's ministry of reconciliation is the only driving force strong enough to tear down the walls of ethnicity and racism that still exist in our world including in the church too (Broocks, 2002:93). God has acted graciously in Christ to unite that, which is estranged. This affects a Kingdom where all can come and all are welcome. The house will not only be "full" in the sense that there is no room, but "full" in the way a family table is "full" when all are present. In this case, however, it is the welcome of every sort and without condition (Van Ruler, 1969:138). No one is left because he or she is of the wrong "sort", whichever way that "sort" may be determined. This fullness is possible, and hence catholicity finds expression. For this reason, one can talk about the heterogeneity that includes a mix of people from different political persuasions, social-economic, and cultural backgrounds.

The New Testament Scripture indicates that the message of Christ contains the enduring love of God to the world (John 3:16, 17:3, 1 John 3:1-10). In the gospels, the greatest commandment is to love God and one's neighbor (Mark 12: 28-34, John 15: 9-15, cf 1 Corinthians 13, 14). The heterogeneous nature of the universal church has generally been reflected in the local church where "an absolute universalism" is practised, there are no political boundaries, sex, age, status, nationality and language" (Janssen, 2011:100).

God longs for all ethnic groups to be converted and to carry on His salvation mission to the world. Consequently, when all ethnic groups come under Christ's discipleship, a process is set in place to remove the negative tendencies of other ethnic tradition within them which is also part of the process of redemption. Christ longs to redeem all ethnic groups so that He can use them to fulfil His mission. Redeemed ethnicity can, therefore, be an asset rather than a liability (Sule-Saa, 2000:38).



The Old Testament covenant always pointed to how the New Testament gospel would be open to all (Sivasundaram, 2008:1ff). When people turn to Christ as their Lord, they turn over to Him all that has defined and shaped them. In the New Testament Scripture, God calls people from all nations to worship Him (John 4:23-24, Mark 11:17 cf Isaiah 56:7). Milne (1982:224) holds that the early church was committed to worship service, a further means of bringing glory to God beyond nationalities.

### **A *qahal* based on tribal or racial integration**

The gospel of Christ moves barriers and makes people of God to integrate. The New Testament Scriptures indicated the equality and integration of members in the church (Acts 4:42-46, 5, 6). In Galatians 3:13-14, Paul argued that the covenant blessing of Abraham was also extended to the Gentiles through belief and confession in Christ (Romans 10:9-12). In Acts 10:34, Peter led by the Spirit proclaimed in Cornelius' house:

I now realize how true it is that God does not show favouritism, but accepts men from every nation who fear Him and do what is right (Acts 10:34).

In Acts 15: 19, Peter argued against imposing Jewish customs on the Gentile believers so that: "we should not trouble the Gentiles who are turning to God." Paul in Galatians 3:13-14, 28 declared in his message that in the church:

There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

In the New Testament in Ephesians, the apostle Paul particularly emphasizes the universal or catholic nature of the church. The church is Christ's body and all things are under Him (1:22-23); the church makes known the manifold wisdom of God (3:10) and will glorify Him to all generations (3:21). The proclamation of the kingdom and Christ's actions had a dual effect: it unified and separated people; Christ's proclamation of the kingdom leads to the formation of the church (Matthew 16:18).

Jesus' own ministry was directed at Jews and Gentiles. In the gospels, Christ gives His disciples the greatest commandment of all as loving God and one's neighbor (Mark 12: 28-34, John 15: 9-15, cf 1 Corinthians 13, 14). His mission to the Jews was expected to set the context for Gentile reception of the message (Sivasundaram, 2008:1-2). An ethnic background is the raw material that God works on in His transformation of His people. God's call always implies that certain aspects of our ethnicity would have to be moderated. Ethnicity is central in the salvation history of God and humanity (Aboagye-Mensah, 1999:21).

This underscores the fact that there is nothing strange in belonging to a particular ethnic group. The contemporary church can faithfully participate in all positive aspects of our ethnic groups and still be used by God to accomplish His mission in the world (Akrong & Gyan-Duah in Sule-Saa, 2000:33). The diverse nature of the church has generally been reflected in the local church where "an absolute universalism" is practised; there are no political boundaries, sex, age, status, nationality and language" (Janssen, 2011:100). God calls people from all nations to worship Him (John 4:23-24, Mark 11:17 cf Isaiah 56:7).

The local congregation of believers should seek to live in unity and diversity. Corporate worship may thus involve the coming together of peoples from multiple backgrounds in terms of ethnicity, class and age, to glorify God and to help each other to follow Him (Sivasundaram, 2008:9f). The early church was committed to worship service, a further means of bringing glory to God beyond



nationalities (Milne, 1982:224). The worship goes to God from our hearts in gratitude through prayer and praise. Nevertheless, worship consists also in service. True praise to God involves the surrender of all one is and has, to be used as an instrument in His hands for accomplishing what He wants done in the world. True worship involves “devoting the will to the purpose of God” (Sivasundaram, 2008:9f). However, ethnic and cultural divisions manifest in different ways in the nations of the earth (Brooks, 2002:95). In Africa, where thousands of tribes, with ethnic ties and races reside, ethnicity leads to a scrambling for space and scarce resources bringing numerous conflicts. In America, the issue is primarily racial segregation between blacks and whites. In India, it is the caste system of class structure that is determined by birth. In Indonesia, the indigenous Indonesians are pitted against the Chinese-Indonesians. One common characteristic of all such cultural schisms is a long, often horrific history of offences that fuel mistrust, bitterness, suffering and even death. It is here where we find the root of ethnic and cultural divisions even among Christian believers. These hot issues can run very deeply and be quite complex (Brooks, 2002:95).

Most people have a tendency to pride themselves on their own ethnic and cultural backgrounds. This is something that has value in and of itself and it helps people measure themselves against other people (Sivasundaram, 2008:6f). Ethnicity and cultural divisions breed deceit and mistrust among the leadership of the diverse church. This impact of ethnicity and cultural divisions, if not checked, could bring disastrous consequences to the church and society (Cordell & Wolff, 2010:4-5). When appropriated properly, ethnicity and cultural divisions could be the positive ingredients that guarantee the realization of the idea of civil society by enhancing participation, integration of loyalties and commitment to the public good of the church and society (Tarimo, 2000:7ff).

### **Analysis and evaluation of the church and enculturation for the contemporary church in the 21<sup>st</sup> century**

The study holds that irrespective of varied perspectives of enculturation, sociological, psychological, anthropological and political, communicative, philosophical and many more disciplines may probably be used, each from its own particular point of view, to shed light on this question. Many African diverse ethnic situations are struggling to understand their European influenced church orders in relation to traditional-cultural practices in their context now (Msiska, 2011:7-111). The communication between traditional cultures could take place effectively through dialogue and participation, through listening and readiness to learn new approaches (Shorter, 1998:132ff). The approaches of church government, operations and activities, must adapt to the various cultures within the complex forms of modern culture.

According to Bevans (1992:70), the praxis model of enculturation/contextual theology focuses on the identity of Christians within a context particularly that context is understood in terms of social change. Bevans (1992:33-39, 40-140) suggests six models of contextual theology, namely: the translation, anthropological, praxis, synthetic, transcendental, and countercultural models. He notes that there is no one completely adequate way of doing theology. He continues saying, one may choose a particular model in a particular context, but one must also be aware that other models may be equally valid in other contexts. When considering which of these models is the best, Bevans (1992:70-140) answers depends on the context. The appropriate and relevant model for an African enculturation is the praxis model supplemented by the anthropological model (Kwang-sun, 2012:5-54).

However, in light of the discussion above, the study holds that the CCAP Livingstonia, Blantyre, Nkhoma Synods in Malawi and the entire church could address the question of



enculturation/contextualization by employing the following relevant models according to the Scriptures and reformed church perspective:

### **The model of common belief in Christ and the confessions**

The model of common belief in Christ and the confessions constitute the church (Matthew 16:16-19). Jesus Christ is the (new) identity for Christian believers. Byrne (1990:131-132) holds that enculturation is necessary in the sense that it is essential to the make-up of the church, both as a historical fact, and from the nature of revelation and God's plan of salvation. In the CCAP Livingstonia, Blantyre, Nkhoma Synods in Malawi and other contemporary churches, there are also numerous differences on how church orders and service are conducted such as traditional initiation ceremonies, marriages, and baptism, Holy Communion, funerals and many other ceremonies based on culture, tribe, language and economic situation of the membership. In accordance to the missiological-evangelistic approaches, enculturation in the CCAP Livingstonia, Blantyre, Nkhoma Synods in Malawi and the entire church could explore, scrutinise and analyse culture concerns, traditional insights and learned attitudes, to which people belong, but also to undertake to "baptise them in the gospel of Christ" and pass them to the people (Vroom, 1995:5). It must be through the Word, Spirit and the Confession that God governs His church and church structures. The church has always used human cultural expression to convey its gospel of Christ to various cultures (Vroom, 1995:5ff).

The study holds that the function of the church must be to incorporate separate ethnic groups, traditions and cultures into its new community under the Lordship of Christ (Milne, 1982: 215). Christ is the Head of the church, the source of all its authority and so governs His church. The Lordship of Christ means that He is Master, the One who rules and makes decisions for the church. The Lordship of Christ is one of the central doctrines of the Scripture and the Reformed Church polity (cf. Matthew 7:21f, Acts 2:36, 1 Peter 3:15, Romans 10:9-14, Colossians 2:6). The Scriptures hold that the people of Israel were called from a distinctive culture, to be God's agents in His mission to the rest of the people of God in the world. Jesus crossed all ethnic and cultural barriers to share the gospel with the Gentiles.

Therefore, a lack of enculturation should not take away true freedom, which is internal. Experience indicates that external freedom on its own is not enough. Enculturation cannot be imposed. It must be freely undertaken (Byrne, 1990:139ff). Christianity spans across many ethnic people-groups on the globe. The gospel is for everyone without restriction based on status, age gender, race, ethnicity and culture (cf. John 4:1-26, Luke 7:1-10, Mark 5:1-34ff). Therefore, to address the question of enculturation in the CCAP Livingstonia, Blantyre and Nkhoma Synods in Malawi and other contemporary churches, the model of common belief in Christ and the confessions must be applied. The Christian faith is about being in a priestly love-relationship with God and one another (Smith, 2012:6).

### **The model of new cultural context/contextualisation**

The Protestant Missiologist David Bosch (1991:420-421) offers broad definitions of the whole area of contextualisation and enculturation in his magisterial work *Transforming Mission*. Bosch (1991:420-421) uses the term "contextual Theology" to cover, in his opinion, two 'proper' contextual theologies, namely enculturation and liberation theologies. This uncovers a fundamental issue which is how widely the "culture" in enculturation or the "context" in contextualisation is understood. A contextual hermeneutics takes as its point of departure a social analysis which operates with a broadened concept of praxis and also implies the cultural facet (Dreyer, 2005:805). Inter-cultural diversity relates to the quality of being diverse, unlike, varied, or ethnically and culturally different from dominant, either or majority groups in the church or society



(Tracey, *et al* 2004:193). A contextual hermeneutics takes as its point of departure a social analysis which operates with a broadened concept of praxis and also implies the cultural facet (Dreyer, 2005:805). Therefore, in this study, enculturation is a process that could be discovered in the creative tension between culture and Christian faith, enculturation and acculturation, *emic* and *etic* perspectives, incarnation and conversion (Rooms, 2007:8f).

There is need for dialogue between churches, religions and traditional cultures that could lead to a better self-identification and hope for convergence or growth towards a common horizon of truth. Dialogue plays an important role in enculturation, especially when dialogue can manifest a new set of meanings and values from the gospel into a given context. It is only through cultural and religious interdependence in corporation, and congruence that conversions can successfully take place within the church and society. However, there is an emerging consensus that culture is a developing process in which there must be a continuous dialogue between faith and culture on all levels of a community (Rooms, 2007:8ff). Therefore, the preaching of the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ can never be culture-free. Missiology and church polity must promote the servitude of the church in the kingdom of God (Du Plooy, 1997:179f).

The Biblical *kerygma* comes to us enveloped in the cultural cloak of the Mediterranean world of that time (Dreyer, 2005:805). The Biblical message cannot be conveyed except through the process of interpreting it in a new cultural context. Preaching as a language-related event binds preaching inextricably with culture as the basis for the common understanding of language symbols. A contextual hermeneutics takes as its point of departure a social analysis which operates with a broadened concept of praxis and also implies the cultural facet (Dreyer, 2005:805). Preaching as a language-related event binds preaching inextricably with culture as the basis for the common understanding of language symbols (Rooms, 2007:8-9). Therefore, to address the question of enculturation in the CCAP Livingstonia, Blantyre and Nkhoma Synods in Malawi and other contemporary churches, the model of new cultural context/contextualisation must be applied.

### **The model of unity in diversity**

The *ekklesia*, church is a unity in diversity and diversity amid unity in the identification with Christ. Plurality is preferable, namely, that one church exists among all peoples, nations, cultures and languages (Du Plooy, 1982:5; Nicolaidis, 2010). The Christian community was called "Christians", for the first time to differentiate it from the Jewish community synagogue (Acts 2:47, 11:26). The salvation of Christ encompasses not just souls, but culture as well at its deepest level. Therefore, the *ekklesia* implies the new community in Christ's salvation (Matthew 16:18, Acts 2:44, 47, Galatians 1:13, Eph 1:22, 1 Corinthians 10:32). The church needs to allow Scripture to become the interpreter of who she is in the specific concrete sense of cultures and traditions. Therefore, the church must inevitably manage ethnicity and tradition culture based on this new identity in Christ.

The Christian faith is not African in origin; a lot has already been lost in terms of the African culture because of its theological influence to this day (Byrne, 1990:130-139). There is probably a gulf between Historical Christian orthodoxy in Africa and the grass roots cultural way of life in the churches – a gulf which is perhaps based on how the church employed superficial missiological methods imported from the West to reach the indigenous African people over many years. Dreyer (2005:793) argues that for the sake of proclaiming the Gospel, the church would have to become "indigenous" to any culture whatsoever. In the church's missionary labour, a particular culture is not elevated to a prerequisite for faith, though the church has to interpret critically the message



of the gospel in every context in which missionary action is taken (Byrne, 1990:139f). However, a new scenario is currently unfolding, namely that denominational churches are increasingly being confronted with the phenomenon of “multiculturalism and diversity at a local level”(Nichols, 1999:11). Therefore, to address the question of enculturation in the CCAP Livingstonia, Blantyre and Nkhoma Synods in Malawi, and other contemporary churches, the model of unity in diversity and diversity amid unity in Christ must be applied.

### **Summary and conclusion**

This study reflected on how the concept of enculturation could be addressed in the evangelistic mission of the Church of the Central Africa Presbyterian (CCAP), Livingstonia, Blantyre Synod and Nkhoma Synods in Malawi. The conversation on the relationship between “church and traditional culture” has for a long time become a topical issue in the church. This question has given a rise to many unanswered questions with regard to the method of gospel evangelization and system of church government employed by some European missionaries in Malawi and the rest of Africa (Tarimo, 2000:5). The following are some of the research findings:

#### **Socio-historical and political formations in Malawi**

Socio-historical and political formations characterised the establishment of the CCAP Livingstonia, Blantyre and Nkhoma Synods in Malawi. The African traditional culture, dictatorship and colonialism played a major role in fostering ethnic divisions in Malawi (Kaspin, 1995:595-620). The Church of Central Africa, Presbyterian (CCAP) is structured mainly based on traditional culture, religious circumstances, socio-political and linguistic matters of regions of Malawi (Sundkler & Steed, 2000:467-80, 795ff). The church employed superficial missiological approaches imported from the West to reach the indigenous African people over many years. Consequently, the CCAP Nkhoma Synod uncritically derived its polity from the enculturation of some traditional Nyau cult practices and drew its leadership from the ethnic Chewa and Ngoni Chiefs/Village Headmen and other leaders of society (Msangaambe, 2011:63f). Therefore, the CCAP Nkhoma Synod used the acculturation approach as the process of two cultures meeting in the evangelistic enterprise, by which both cultures are changed. Cultural change though will always be the outcome of acculturation (Rooms, 2007:6-7). However, enculturation theology stresses that the goal is not to promote African culture. But the goal lies in allowing the gospel message to challenge African culture. This new approach to evangelistic enterprise will allow for a dialogue to take place between the two realities: “faith and culture”.

#### **Cultural-contextual gospel in the CCAP Synods in Malawi**

The cultural-contextual gospel characterised preaching of the Word in the CCAP Synods of Livingstonia, Blantyre and Nkhoma Synods in Malawi. The preaching of the message had the purpose of helping people in a new cultural context to articulate their identity as a community of the faithful (Dreyer, 2005:805). The CCAP Livingstonia, Blantyre and Nkhoma Synods used Dr. David Livingstone’s three CCC (Christianity, Commerce, Civilisation) to reaching new peoples in the interior of Africa, introduce Christianity and eliminate slavery and its evils (Gama, 2010:49f). The church and preaching did not have a direct cultural task, but because proclaiming the gospel was aimed at people in a particular context, the effect of preaching called on people of the faith to be critical of their own culture. Consequently, preaching had a European Missionary cultural effect in an indirect way (Dreyer, 2005:805ff). The church needs to allow Scripture to become the interpreter of who she is in the specific concrete sense of cultures and traditions. Therefore, the church must inevitably manage ethnicity and traditional culture based on the new identity in Christ. The contemporary church has a new cultural community based on Christ.



## **The new community in the CCAP Synods in Malawi**

The new community in Christ characterised the message of the CCAP Livingstonia, Blantyre and Nkhoma Synods in Malawi. The CCAP Livingstonia, Blantyre and Nkhoma Synods established new 'Mission stations', Livingstonia in North, Blantyre in South and Nkhoma in the Central region as new centres of Christianity, education and civilization (Gama, 2010:49f). The salvation of Christ encompasses not just souls, but culture as well at its deepest level of spirituality. Therefore, the *ekklesia* implies the new community in Christ's salvation (Matthew 16:18, Acts 2:44, 47, Galatians 1:13, Ephesians 1:22, 1 Corinthians 10:32; Nicolaidis, 2010). The church needs to allow Scripture to become the interpreter of who she is in the specific concrete sense of "cultures and traditions". Therefore, the church must inevitably manage ethnicity and traditions based on this new identity in Christ. The contemporary church has a new cultural community based on Christ.

## **Ethnic segregation from South Africa to Malawi**

Ethnic segregation from South Africa characterised the Dutch Reformed Church Missionaries in Malawi. The Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) Missionaries were more interested in advancing the Dutch identity along with its racial political undertones. Among White Missionaries, the Dutch identity was not based on ecclesiastical tradition, but rather on a nationalistic ideology that arose as result of the Anglo-Boer War 1899-1902 CE against the English (Mapala, 2016: 97). Du Plooy (1997:179f) holds that missiology and church polity promote the servitude of the church in the kingdom of God (Du Plooy, 1997:179f). The contemporary church can faithfully participate in all positive aspects of our ethnic groups and still be used by God to accomplish His mission in the world (Sule-Saa, 2000:33). The diverse nature of the church has generally been reflected in the local church where "an absolute universalism" is practised; there are no political boundaries, sex, age, status, nationality and language" (Janssen, 2011:100). God calls people from all nations to worship Him (John 4:23-24, Mark 11:17 cf Isaiah 56:7).

## **The traditional culture of the people characterised divisions in Malawi**

The traditional culture of the people characterised divisions of the CCAP Livingstonia, Blantyre and Nkhoma Synods in Malawi. In the CCAP, there are separate congregations designated exclusively for the Nkhonde, Tumbuka, and Tonga ethnic language speakers in the Northern Region, Chewa ethnic language speakers in the Central Region, Yao, Chinyanja and Lomwe ethnic language speakers in Southern Region. Enculturation theology stresses that the goal is not to promote one African culture. But the goal lies in allowing the gospel message to challenge African cultures.

The first approach to evangelistic enterprise would be to allow for a "dialogue and interaction" to take place between the two realities: "Christian faith and culture". The second approach to the problem of language would be to "translate" of the Scriptures, Christian doctrine, and gospel message into particular vernacular dialect of the people. The third approach would be to "baptize some of the important African rites, customs and practices" in order to accommodate people and cultures from different ethnic backgrounds into the diverse church. The responsibility of contemporary church could be to construct a theological for the management of the "gospel ministry and culture" in its *missio-dei* endeavours.

The local congregation of believers should seek to live in unity and diversity. Corporate worship may thus involve the coming together of peoples from multiple backgrounds in terms of ethnicity, class and age, to glorify God and to help each other to follow Him (Sivasundaram, 2008:9f). The early church was committed to worship service, a further means of bringing glory to God beyond



nationalities (Milne, 1982:224). The worship goes to God from our hearts in gratitude through prayer and praise. Nevertheless, worship consists also in service. True praise to God involves the surrender of all one is and has, to be used as an instrument in His hands for accomplishing what He wants done in the world. True worship involves “devoting the will to the purpose of God” (Sivasundaram, 2008:9f).

Consequently, the danger of enculturation is syncretism. Syncretism is the mixing of different religions, philosophies and ideas (Hornby, 2010:1535). Kwang-sun (2012:9) holds that there are strong arguments surrounding syncretism in theological schools. Some stress the purity of the gospel, the Christian identity, and the threat from other religions. Others, against a western-centred understanding of the gospel, seek the ground for a creative and dynamic syncretism (Kwang-sun, 2012:9f). Kraemer (1938:308) provides an example of the negative position on syncretism, arguing that Christo-centric Christianity is not compatible with syncretism because there is no salvation without Jesus Christ, who is a unique representation of God’s revelation as disclosed in the Bible (Kraemer, 1938:308).

## Conclusion

In conclusion, the theology of enculturation could be integrated into the missiology and church polity principles of the Church of the Central Africa Presbyterian (CCAP), Livingstonia, Blantyre Synod and Nkhoma Synods in Malawi. The study holds that changes in political and constitutional context demand ethnic diversity to be managed orderly by the contemporary church (Dreyer, 2005:803ff). Therefore, the concept of practical enculturation is most relevant to the CCAP Livingstonia, Blantyre, Nkhoma Synods in Malawi and other contemporary churches, which have been Christianized. As long as faith is present to a traditional culture, then enculturation dialogue must take place (Rooms, 2007:8-10). The preaching of the gospel of Christ should aim at helping people in a new cultural context to articulate their identity as a new community of the faithful (Dreyer, 2005:805).

The contemporary church must apply enculturation biblical principles in its own complex situation in order to maintain the well-being of the church and reshape the work of the church so that it may serve the Kingdom of God (Vorster, 2011:1-2). This enculturation theology must be a process that could discover creative tension between Christian faith and culture, enculturation and acculturation, emic and etic perspectives, incarnation and conversion (Rooms, 2007:8f). Therefore, the contemporary church should reconstruct enculturation theology to meet the needs of the people. It must be the church of the people, by the culture of people and for the people of Africa. The mutual exposure and dialogue should allow Africans and others to be able to live out authentic Christianity within their own traditional and cultural milieu (Shorter, 1998:132ff). This is how the church and enculturation could be redefined and operationalized as a relevant theological approach for evangelistic missions in the CCAP Livingstonia, Blantyre and Nkhoma Synods in Malawi and elsewhere in 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

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